

contains a large tax credit for the purchase of plug-in hybrid vehicles, cars such as the Chevy Volt which will be able to run solely on electricity only for the first 40 miles after being plugged in.

If projections by some experts hold true and half the cars on the road in the year 2030 are plug-in hybrids, we could easily cut our use of oil by one-third or more. By this time we would be producing enough renewable energy to power all of these cars and still have electricity to spare. If we want cheap gasoline, to be free from imported oil, create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, then we need to pass this tax credit extension. It is that simple.

I am relieved in one sense that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have finally come to the table to let us vote on something that will actually produce energy, but I am concerned that there are still those objecting to us proceeding. This fall, voters, however, are not going to forget that the price the Republican Party has forced on the American people in order to get to these renewable energy sources is to continue \$8 billion in subsidies for big oil. When the American voters see that, they are going to have a much different view of what they do in these elections, and we will see a very different Federal Government come January.

I also want to address another essential piece of the tax extenders program, and that is the temporary fix of the alternative minimum tax. New Jersey's hard-working families deserve real tax relief. More than 70 percent of the President's tax cuts have gone to people making over \$200,000, while families who earn anywhere between \$50,000 and \$75,000 have received less than 5 percent of those cuts. Yet the President has done nothing to make the AMT exemption permanent, a tax which, in the next 4 years, would affect nearly every family of four earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000 if nothing is done.

The President has directed all his efforts, priorities, and the Nation's bank account to tax breaks for the wealthiest, leaving little room, let alone money, for the reforms that will affect nearly 24 million middle-class families.

When Americans wonder why there has been little attention on what most tax analysts refer to as the "single most important tax issue" facing the Nation, they should know that it is because tax cuts for the middle class have clearly not been a priority of this administration.

I am glad we are moving in this Democratic majority in a different way. The fact is that, without this bill, middle-class families will be faced with a harsh reality at the end of the year. In my State of New Jersey, where roughly 270,000 families were subjected to the alternative minimum tax in 2006, the number of middle-class taxpayers subject to this tax would explode if no fix is enacted. Average families, who are far from wealthy, could

face significantly higher taxes this year if we do not act on the crisis at hand. This fix makes very clear that our priority should be to protect middle-class families from an unintentional tax hike, and that millions of taxpayers should not wake up next tax season to realize they owe more in taxes even though their income has not changed.

Let's remember, this was a tax intended to ensure that those making over \$200,000 a year were not able to game the system and avoid paying any taxes toward the common good at all. It was never intended to raise the taxes of average Americans.

So let's send a clear message that the values we embrace are the values of helping American families. Let's embrace fairness and equal treatment for those who are working hard. We can do that in this bill.

Finally, let me thank again Chairman BAUCUS and others for their hard work in crafting this legislation to extend the renewable energy tax credits and to temporarily fix the alternative minimum tax.

But I do urge my colleagues who are objecting to bringing up this legislation to drop their objections. You cannot expect more for oil than even what you have gotten in this bill. These are obstacles the American people clearly cannot afford at this time, that this country cannot afford at this time in one of the worst financial times.

This will be one part of a solution to move us in a direction that creates jobs, that can stimulate our economy, that can break our dependency on oil, that can do something about our environment and, at the same time—and, at the same time—ensure that we give relief to middle-class families through that relief in the alternative minimum tax.

I hope if, in fact, we can get through our colleagues' objections—the majority leader has tried to bring up this bill already—if we are able to do so, we can send a message as this week comes to a close that the Senate is finally on the way to giving relief to American families in a real, meaningful way, and as people are losing their jobs in this economy, we can be at the threshold of creating a new generation of jobs in which people will be able to prosper and the Nation will be able to meet its energy needs for the future.

Madam President, with that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX EXTENDERS

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, there is extraordinary economic hurt in much of rural America this evening, and that is especially the case in my part of our country in rural Oregon. We are going to have a chance to do something about that with the tax extenders legislation. I come to the floor today to urge its passage.

A number of colleagues have been wondering about the folks in green shirts who are out and about on Capitol Hill this week. These are some of the country's best people committed to making this country a better place, and they are here because they come from communities where the Federal Government owns much of the land and the Federal Government, regrettably, has been talking about breaking its commitment to these communities.

About 100 years ago, the Federal Government entered into an agreement with these communities. In effect, the Federal Government said: When the National Forest System is created, so it benefits people across the country—in Minnesota, in New York, in Florida, and all across the land—because we are going to have property owned by the Federal Government, we will assist those communities with funds for schools and essential services.

That worked for a number of years when the timber cut was fairly high and we were able to get the funds those communities needed for essential services. However, when the laws began to change in the 1990s and timber cut went down, all of a sudden those communities were hard-pressed to keep the schools open in my part of the country and to make sure there was essential law enforcement service—on the beat fighting methamphetamines and providing key services on our Federal lands. So in 2000, I authored a law with our friend and colleague, Senator CRAIG, and brought those communities money for schools, money for essential services, but regrettably, that money has run out. As the revenues and benefits that we receive from our national forests change with the times, Congress simply can't walk away from its responsibility to provide funding to rural counties.

Now, because of the good work particularly of Chairman BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, there will be an opportunity to renew our commitment to these rural communities and to do it in a way that is going to allow these communities, after a few additional years, to get into additional opportunities for economic growth and creating good-paying jobs for their citizens. For example, I have said that if we pass this legislation—and it authorizes \$3.8 billion in desperately needed funds for rural schools and essential services—we are going to use those 4 years so that at the end of that period, our rural communities can be involved in a number of other economic development activities that will allow their communities to prosper. For example, we

communities can be involved in a number of other economic development activities that will allow their communities to prosper. For example, we know that in our part of the country—and this has been true in much of the land where there is great risk of fire—there is a need to thin some of these forests. In our part of the country, it is second growth. It may be different in the Midwest and Minnesota and other parts of the land.

But the point is, they are working together—people in the forest product sector, environmental leaders, scientists, and others—they are coming together and over the next 4 years will act in a fashion that will allow us to say that, on our watch, by making sure we acted today so these communities could survive, we used this period so that they could get into additional opportunities that would allow their communities to prosper and provide good-paying jobs for their people.

Right now, pink slips have been sent out to county workers, teachers, and others, and without the action that has been achieved in the extenders legislation on a bipartisan basis, led by Chairman BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, without their work becoming law, it is my view that the very fabric of rural communities in our part of the country and over much of the United States will be torn asunder.

A number of colleagues have worked hard on this legislation, and that is because this 100-year commitment we have had with rural America has always been bipartisan. The fact is, Americans who enjoy the National Forest System don't come to the forest and get asked whether they are Democrats or Republicans. It has been something that has been beneficial to our Nation, and in return, we said that our rural communities would be given the funds they need for essential services. The fact is, in much of the country where there is not Federal land, where there is not land in Federal ownership, they sell private property, they tax private property, they generate revenue, and they pay for essential services. That is what is different about my home State where the Federal Government owns much of the land. We haven't been able to do that.

I see my friend and colleague on the floor, Senator CRAIG. We worked together to update our commitment to rural America back in 2000. We put in place, for example, resource advisory councils—and Senator CRAIG remembers this well—that brought together people in the forest product sector and environmental leaders. Several of them said: What you were able to do with Senator CRAIG has people working together in the natural resources field who never worked together before.

So this has been a program that has worked. We have tried to extend it on a multiyear basis. I offered legislation previously with Senator CRAIG. We got 74 votes. An overwhelming majority of the Senate supported this legislation.

Yet we were not able to get it enacted into law.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, would the Senator yield?

Mr. WYDEN. I am happy to yield.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I thank the Senator from Oregon, Mr. WYDEN, for the work he has continually done on behalf of timber-dependent school districts and this uniqueness that Western States have that have these large portfolios of public land and have grown increasingly dependent upon the action taken by the Federal Government and the reaction in the States and the impact on the economy of local communities. When he and I stood together and worked out Wyden-Craig, Craig-Wyden and worked with our timber-dependent school districts and got it funded, we solved a very big problem.

The advisory committees the Senator speaks to were in themselves a phenomenon in the sense that after 2,300 decisions by those groups to do activities on public lands, and not one of them objected to by an interest group or a suit filed to stop them, Senator WYDEN and I grew convinced that we could work together to resolve our public land issues when we put determination and resource behind them, and that is what we did.

I thank Senator WYDEN very much for staying with this. It is my understanding that in the tax extenders package we will consider this coming week, we will see a reauthorization of Wyden-Craig that will get this work done, send a message back to our school districts and our counties that we are here to help, to assist, and to stabilize the very dire economic conditions those school districts and counties are experiencing. I thank Senator WYDEN for sticking to it and with it because it is that kind of resolve that may solve this substantial problem.

I thank the Senator for yielding.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I don't want to turn this into a bouquet-tossing contest, but the fact is that Senator CRAIG and I have been partners in this for some time. We believed we had a good model when we moved to pass it during the Clinton years in 2000. It has exceeded our expectations in terms of bringing people together and helping these rural communities survive.

I simply say to colleagues that as part of this tax extenders package, by extending the program now through 2011, the legislation would give rural communities the certainty they need to plan for the future and get them off this roller coaster of disaster one day, hope the next, that has been the pattern of the last few years.

There are a lot of exciting things going on in the rural West. My friend from Idaho and I, as we sat on the Forestry Subcommittee, have heard the exciting developments, for example, in projects to thin and restore the Nation's forests, have heard about the good work that is being done in terms

of biomass, taking essentially woody waste and turning it into a source of clean fuel. We have been working together to make sure the Federal Government gets the right definition of biomass so that we can allow these programs to go forward. Carbon sequestration would be a third opportunity that we know will be a sensible step because it will help improve the climate and create economic revenue.

So as Senator CRAIG and I sat and listened to this testimony all of these many hours about thinning and biomass and carbon sequestration, it became clear to us that as long as our rural communities weren't denied the funds they needed to keep going, which is what we are talking about today, they could use these next 4 years to get into some very exciting and promising fields in the years ahead.

Madam President, I am very pleased that my friend from Idaho has come to the floor, and I know I have exceeded my time for morning business. I simply say to my colleagues that I hope they will pass the extenders package. The funds involved are for secure rural schools, and it is critically needed now so they can use this time to make sure young people, law enforcement, and other essential needs are addressed.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I understand that Senator AKAKA is en route to the floor to speak and possibly put forth a unanimous consent request. He is entering the Chamber now. I know he has time for that consideration. I will not speak as in morning business, but I will close by saying I thank my colleague from Oregon.

The years we have worked together have become a very valuable partnership for the benefit of public land States and for us to recognize the changing world in which we live in these States. But the demand is still on the communities. No matter how the use of public land—or how we apply policy to public land changes, we still have to maintain roads, bridges, and schools if there is going to be vitality in a community that can support new economic opportunity in the coming years. That is what the Senator has so eloquently spoken to. We both recognized that, and we used the Public Land Subcommittee of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which I chaired and which he now chairs, as that link and partnership to accomplish a great deal of this. I thank him for that work.

I yield the floor.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. AKAKA. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.